

## MARY FISK SPENCER

Mary Fisk Spencer died in San Diego, California, December 27, 1940. She was within twelve days of completing her one hundredth year. For fifty of those years, in spite of weak eyesight and handicapped by poor health, she had been an indefatigable botanizer; from 1878 to 1914 in Central and Southern Europe, and from 1915 to 1928 in southern California, chiefly in the arid sections of San Diego County. Her collections are found in the leading herbaria of Europe and America and in the private herbaria of many specialists, especially in Europe. Her death marks the passing of an outstanding amateur botanist.

Mary Evelyn Fisk was born at Brecksville, Ohio, January 8, 1841, the daughter of John Shipley Fisk and Anne Clapp Clark, both of whom were from New England. Her father, a master machinist, changed his residence frequently, being in charge successively of iron works in Knoxville, Tennessee, Franklin Falls, Ohio, and Cleveland, Ohio. As a result of change of residence and financial difficulties Miss Fisk's education was badly interrupted. When she was fifteen she enrolled in the Preparatory Department of Oberlin College, which was then almost the only coeducational institution in the middle west, if not in the entire country. A year of teaching followed, after which she enrolled in the Literary Department of the College for the years 1858-1859 and 1860-1861. A bank failure put an end to her college work.

Miss Fisk was musically gifted and while at Oberlin must have received considerable musical instruction, since, then as now, Oberlin was giving great attention to music. During the early eighteen-sixties she taught private music classes in and about Cleveland, but about 1865 was able to enter the old Boston (Massachusetts) Music School for study under B. F. Baker; she graduated there, then taught music privately in Boston. However, she wanted further training and by 1874 was studying at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Munich, Germany. After two years of strenuous work she suffered a nervous breakdown, and was thereafter compelled to lead an outdoor life.

During this period of European study she met James MacGoffin Spencer, who had gone to Munich in 1874 to study chemistry. They were married on July 28, 1878, and until September 1914, when they returned to the United States to live, resided in Munich. Mr. Spencer had been for six years Professor of Mathematics in the National Deaf and Dumb College in Washington, D. C. After a severe illness he was obliged to lead a life of leisure, which he diversified by travel and study. Thus it was necessary for both Mr. and Mrs. Spencer to have a rather quiet, outdoor life; and their means, though modest, permitted extensive travel.

During the years that Miss Fisk was in Oberlin she became a devoted admirer of Dr. James Dascomb (M. D. Dartmouth, 1833),





PLATE 6. MARY FISK SPENCER. Photograph taken about 1925.



